

CHLOROFLUOROCARBON BLUES

Ruth and Ellis tune in the weather report on the radio. The D.J. says another glob of ozone-depleted air the size of New Mexico has drifted down from the arctic hole and this might just be a day to stay inside and read a good book.

Ruth leafs through a fashion magazine and Ellis watches a boxing match he'd taped last weekend; a boring, tactical fight, so he loses interest and dozes in his chair. Ruth gets up for a glass of iced tea, and little Roy, unwatched, wanders out to the patio wearing only a plastic diaper. For the thirty seconds it takes his mother to find him, he fries. When Ruth pulls him into the shade, he's as red and shiny as a ripe tomato, and he's beginning to swell. She plunges him into a cold bath and sends Ellis down to the Seven-Eleven for as many bags of ice as he can buy, and she calls the Ultraviolet Hotline. The doctor says, "Thirty seconds? He'll probably be O.K."

WATER, Part 1

Sea level is rising. The small valley behind Ruth and Ellis' house has been transformed from a gently sloped, dry creek bed into a blue lagoon. The houses on the bank below are submerged, with just their peaked roofs protruding above the water; a row of floating pyramids. Directly down from where Ellis enjoys his view over the back fence, Ralph and Betty sit leaned up against their chimney drinking highballs and reading the evening paper. Ellis calls down to him, "Hey Ralph, how's it goin', Bud?" Ralph lays his paper on his lap and calls up, "Not bad, El, how 'bout yourself?" Ellis shrugs and says, "Can't complain." Ralph looks out over the water and says, "Sure hope she don't rise no more." Ellis nods.

A hundred yards out, above the poisons wafting up from the garden shop of a submerged K-Mart, a mother whale gives birth and nudges her calf up to the surface for its first gasp of air.

SUMMERTIME

The Loma Alta Brass Band took a break from their practice session: Butch laid his trombone on the carpet, pulled off his t-shirt and wiped his sweaty pits with it; Ellis disengaged himself from his tuba and stood up and stretched his back, then tugged his damp underwear from the crack of his ass; Bob leaned his sax up against his recliner and

leaned back and closed his eyes and said, "Man, it's hot, wonder when it's gonna break?" Clete laid his clarinet across his lap and wiped his wet forehead with a bare hand and said, "Never."

Ruth, lounging on the couch and stroking her sleeping son's damp back, hummed Gershwin's 'Summertime' softly and slowly.

Outside the sun blazed in mid-sky. Heat shimmered off the surface of the lagoon, and back in the hills behind the city a scrawny coyote died under a dried up old pepper tree.

WATER, Part 2

The Augua Hedionda Lagoon was, before the temperature change, an acre of murky, scum-covered water nestled between Loma Alta's stinking sewage treatment plant and a poorly maintained (brown grass, bent and rusted basketball hoops) beach-side park. When the ice caps melted, the lagoon grew, filling the little valley of the dribbling creek that fed it to become an immense turquoise sea that jutted five miles inland and measured a mile and a half across — north to south — at its widest point.

As the lagoon swelled — with unexpected swiftness (it rose to its highest level in just under a week) — it swallowed up the low-lying trailer parks and mini-malls and grocery stores and gas stations and K-Marts that had sprouted along the city's main east/west corridor — Loma Alta Boulevard — and leveled off, and the whales that usually traveled further down the coast to Baja California's more secluded inlets to have their calves began arriving.

And Ellis Leahy, whose tract house lot had been carved out of a hillside in the back end of the formerly parched valley, now had waterfront property: gentle waves lapped at the bank inches below his back yard, and he pulled out the fence and he and his wife Ruth would sit at sunset and dangle their feet in the water's cool comfort and watch the spouting leviathans frolic a mere hundred yards from their back door.

And the real estate agents, banking nervously on the stabilization of the sea level (some experts said yes, some experts said no), crawled over the neighborhood like cockroaches, offering huge prices for the fortuitously located houses.